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STATINTL

Notable & Quotable

Sen. J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, addressing the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association.

I would like to talk with you tonight about the fallout effects of the Vietnamese war in three areas—our relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, relations with our allies in Western Europe and the internal impact within the United States . . .

The ideological aspect of the Vietnamese war is slowly undermining good relations between the United States and Eastern Europe. The detente whose progress was generating such optimism hardly more than a year ago has been arrested and a slow, steady erosion has set in.

How far it will go, and with what unfortunate results, will be determined by the future course and scale of the war in Vietnam.

The principal reason why things are not a lot worse than they are is the restraint shown by the Russians with respect to the war. They are providing the North Vietnamese with a steady flow of supplies, including the ground-to-air missiles that are used against American aircraft, but they show no inclination to participate directly in the war and even their anti-American propaganda is comparatively mild . . .

As long as the Vietnamese war is fought on its present scale, the Russians may remain essentially outside of the conflict—although that is by no means certain. But if the war is significantly expanded, the Russians will be brought under mounting Chinese goading for standing aside while the Americans devastate a Soviet ally. With their prestige thus impaired, fear could give way to anger, and the Russians might then take the enormous risk of direct intervention in the war.

For the present, the main fallout effect of the war on East-West relations is the loss of the opportunities associated with the American policy of building bridges to the East. The significance of that loss is great indeed; it amounts to the suspension of progress toward normal relations between the two great nations which hold the power of life and death over all of humanity.

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The effects of the Vietnamese war on America's relations with its Western European allies are more difficult to assess.

The most obvious fact is that our major allies are not supporting us in Vietnam. There are three possible explanations for their refusal to participate in the war, each of which, if valid, suggests that there is something wrong with American policy.

First, they may believe that it simply does not matter, from the viewpoint of their own security, who wins the Vietnamese war. Or, secondly, they may believe that their security is affected but there is no point in becoming involved because the United States, under what has been called the "Rusk doctrine," is unilaterally committed to resist any and all threats to the free world and will take all the risks and accept all the costs regardless of what anyone else does.

And finally, our allies may have judged that it is neither necessary nor possible for a Western army to fight a successful land war on the Asian mainland and that their security, and ours, can be defended from the islands and waters off the coast of Asia where our sea and air power is dominant.

It is contended by American policymakers that if the United States makes major concessions in Vietnam the credibility of our other guarantees and commitments will be undermined and countries which depend on American support, from Thailand to Germany, will lose faith in the United States.

As H. L. Mencken once said, there is something in this but not much. In fact, many of America's allies are more inclined to worry about an undue American preoccupation with Vietnam than to fear the consequences of an American withdrawal, provided that withdrawal were orderly and based on a negotiated agreement. . . .

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The war in southeast Asia has affected the internal life of the United States in two important ways: It has diverted our energies from the Great Society program which began so promisingly a year ago, and it has generated the beginning of a war fever in the minds of the American people and their leaders.

Despite brave talk about having both "guns and butter," . . . my own view is that there is a kind of madness in the facile assumption that we can raise the many billions of dollars necessary to rebuild our schools and cities and public transport and eliminate the pollution of air and water while also spending tens of billions to finance an "open-ended" war in Asia.

But even if the material resources can somehow be drawn from an expanding economy, I do not think that the spiritual resources will long be forthcoming from an angry and disappointed people.

There is a kind of Gresham's law of public policy: fear drives out hope, security precedes welfare and it is only to the extent that a country is successful in the prevention of bad things that it is set free to concentrate on those pursuits which bring happiness into the lives of its people.

The turning away from these pursuits after so brief an interlude is the first and at present more conspicuous fallout effect of the war on American life.

The second, and potentially more damaging, is the stirring up of a war fever in the minds of our people and leaders; it is only just now getting under way, but as the war goes on, as the casualty lists grow longer and affect more and more American homes, the fever will rise and the patience of the American people will give way to mounting demands for an expanded war, for a lightning blow that will get it over with at a stroke. . . .

America is showing some signs of that fatal presumption, that overextension of power and mission, which brought ruin to ancient Athens, to Napoleonic France and to Nazi Germany. The process has hardly begun, but the war which we are now fighting can only accelerate it. . . .